

# CARTOONING

## CHARACTERISTICS OVERVIEW CHART

Verbal Skills	Grade Levels	Cognitive Level	Areas Addressed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nonverbal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PK	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Classic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (Pre)Academic/Cognitive/Academic
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mixed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Elementary	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High Functioning	<input type="checkbox"/> Adaptive Behavior/ Daily Living
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Verbal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Middle/High		<input type="checkbox"/> Behavior <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Communication/Speech <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Emotional

## BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Individuals with autism (AU) are generally viewed as visual learners. Therefore, using this modality as an instructional medium is an effective way to enhance social understanding for students with autism. One effective way is cartooning—drawing a situation and the thoughts of other people in the situation. As visual supports, these strategies can support various needs such as social or behavioral skills, organizational skills, and academic skills.

## DESCRIPTION

Cartooning can be very helpful for the visually oriented student to facilitate understanding of social situations and anticipated behaviors, as well as the thoughts of other people in a given situation. Research shows that cartoon techniques, such as thought and speech bubbles, enable the individual with autism to get a sense of social interactions and the hidden rules that govern behaviors (Kerr & Durkin, 2004).

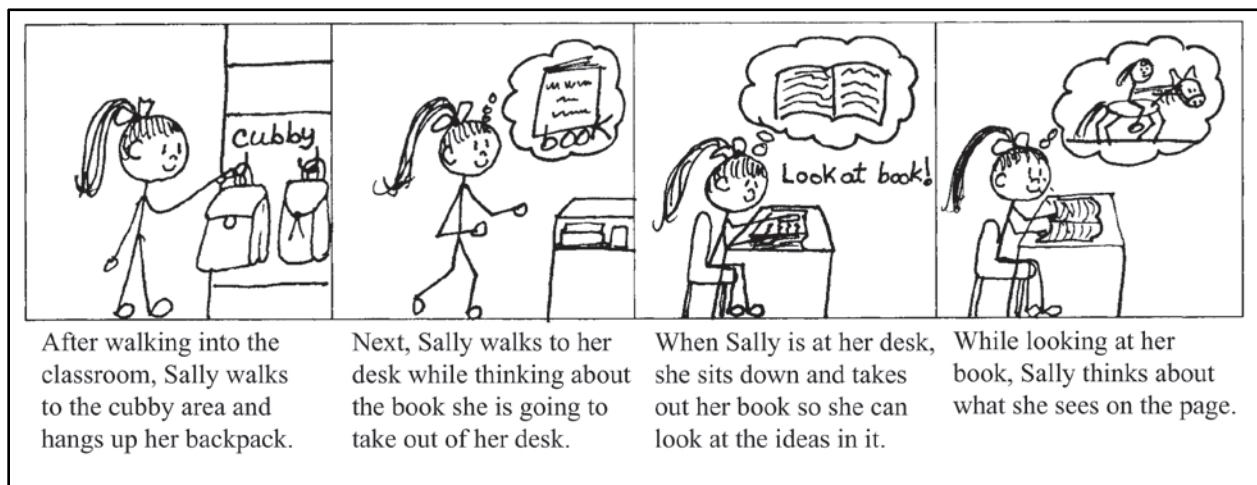
One cartooning strategy is known as Comic Strip Conversations™, developed by Gray (1994). By illustrating conversation through simple drawings, the strategy helps the student to identify “what other people say and do” and emphasizes “what other people may be thinking.” Drawing a short conversation with symbols to represent persons and speech while talking assists the

student in learning how general conversations occur. Laminated marker boards, paper, or chalkboards are recommended as useful materials for cartooning.

Examples of cartooning include:

- Drawing about a short and conventional conversation (e.g., greeting, birthday celebration, saying “excuse me,” or saying “I’m sorry.”)
- Drawing about a situation (e.g., describing a situation that makes people mad, sad, or happy)
- Guessing what other people would do or say in a certain situation
- Guessing what other people would think in a certain situation

The following cartoon was drawn to help Sally understand how to enter the classroom and start her day.



From Arwood, E. L., & Kaulitz, C. (2007). *Learning with a visual brain in an auditory world – Visual language strategies for individuals with autism spectrum disorders*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company. Used with permission.

## STEPS

The following steps may be applied when using Comic Strip Conversations™ (Gray, 1994, p. 5):

1. Introduce comic strip conversations to a student. Adults, including teachers or parents, introduce a student to Comic Strip Conversations™ as well as symbols (e.g., symbols for a classroom, a playground, speech, or thought). The adult demonstrates how to draw

situations while talking; then provides chances for the student to practice a Comic Strip Conversation™ with someone else.

2. Draw “small talk.” After introducing Comic Strip Conversations™, it is helpful to start to engage the student with small talk to begin a Comic Strip Conversation™. The student and an adult are seated close to each other and hold a Comic Strip Conversation™. Joint attention might be a prerequisite skill for this strategy.
3. Draw about a given situation. When drawing about a situation, the following information must be gathered (Gray, 1994, p. 9):
  - Where are you? (the student draws a person)
  - Who else is here? (the student draws a person)
  - What are you doing? (the student draws relevant items and/or actions)
  - What happened? What did other people do? (the student draws relevant items and/or actions)
  - What did you say? (use conversation bubble)
  - What did other people say? (use conversation bubble)
  - What did you think when you said that? (use thought bubble)
  - What did other people think when they said that/did that? (use thought bubble)
4. Draw about an upcoming situation. Comic Strip Conversations™ can be useful for describing and explaining a future event or activity to a student. Sometimes the student might insist on having exact information about the event or activity. To prevent providing incorrect information or confusion, the adult conversational partner must include possible variations in the conversation (“sometimes,” “not always,” “may happen,” etc.).

## BRIEF EXAMPLE

Justin, a 10-year-old boy with autism, is very shy about talking to his classmates. He often says “hi” very loudly to his peers or teachers, but does not interact socially with his classmates. He tells his teacher and paraprofessionals that he wants to have a friend, but he does not seem to know how to initiate or maintain a conversation with his peers. Mr. Harris, Justin’s speech-language-pathologist, planned to use Comic Strip Conversations™ to promote Justin’s appropriate social behavior. He introduced the strategy to Justin, and together they developed Justin’s personal dictionary for symbols.

Before beginning to cartoon, Mr. Harris always opened Justin’s Comic Strip Conversations™ book and reminded him of the symbols that Justin had developed. They started to use Comic Strip Conversations™ for small talk. Once he got started, Justin used Comic Strip Conversations™ on a daily basis after recess, after lunch, and at the end of the day. Related personnel, including class teachers and paraprofessionals, were also trained to use Comic Strip Conversations™ and Justin’s special symbols.

When Justin had difficulty understanding certain situations during a class, Justin was encouraged to draw these situations. Justin and Mr. Harris would discuss what happened and what Justin felt, and then Justin guessed what other people would think. Justin completed his own conversation book that was sent home daily for reinforcement from his parents.

## **SUMMARY**

As visual supports, drawing and cartooning help students understand various social skills or situations. Students have opportunities to think about the situation and others’ thoughts by drawing the activity or using Comic Strip Conversations™. Drawing and cartooning enhance participation of the student in the activity and task.

## **RESEARCH TABLE**

<b>Number of Studies</b>	<b>Ages (year)</b>	<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>Area(s) Addressed</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
5	3-14	25	Social behavior, social interactions, appropriate behavior, communication	+

## **STUDIES CITED IN RESEARCH TABLE**

1. Pierson, M. R., & Glaeser, B. C. (2007). Using comic strip conversations to increase social satisfaction and decrease loneliness in students with autism spectrum disorder. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 42*, 460-466.  
Three elementary male students aged 6 to 8 with high-functioning AU participated in this study. Comic Strip Conversations™ were used to improve their social skills for a period of six weeks.

Increased friendships in the classroom and on the playground as well as visible signs of social satisfaction among the participants were observed.

2. Pierson, M. R., & Glaeser, B. C. (2005). Extension of research on social skills training using comic strip conversations to students without autism. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 40*, 279-284.  
Four students aged 6 to 10 who had severe social skill deficits participated in the study. All participants improved their perceptions of social situations, exhibited appropriate social growth, began to generate their own solutions to difficult social situations, and demonstrated a decrease in target behaviors.
3. Kerr, S., & Durkin, K. (2004). Understanding of thought bubbles as mental representations in children with autism: Implications for theory of mind. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 34*, 637-648.  
Twelve children with AU ranging in age from 3 to 6 years participated in this study. Results revealed that the students understood that the cartoon bubbles depicted speech and thoughts.
4. Thiemann, K., & Goldstein, H. (2004). Effects of peer training and written text cuing on social communication of school age children with pervasive developmental disorder. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 47*, 126-144.  
Five children with AU or Asperger Syndrome participated in a study on cartooning and peer training to address social skills challenges. The interventions resulted in increased communication and improved quality of social interactions.
5. Rogers, M. F., & Myles, B. S. (2001). Using social stories and comic strip conversations to interpret social situations for an adolescent with Asperger Syndrome. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 36*, 310-313.  
A 14-year-old student with Asperger Syndrome participated in the study designed to decrease inappropriate behaviors resulting from misinterpretation of social situations. Social Stories™ were created to help the student interpret social situations. Cartooning was used as the student continued to experience behavior challenges due to failure to understand social situations. The student met daily with his resource room teacher to cartoon. The results showed that the student began to request the use of cartoons at school and at home.

## REFERENCES

- Gray, C. (1994). *Comic strip conversations: Illustrated interactions that teach conversation skills to students with autism and related disorders*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons, Inc.
- Kerr, S., & Durkin, K. (2004). Understanding of thought bubbles as mental representation in children with autism: Implications for theory of mind. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 34*, 637-648.
- Pierson, M. R., & Glaeser, B. C. (2005). Extension of research on social skills training using comic strip conversations to students without autism. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 40*, 279-284.

- Pierson, M. R., & Glaeser, B. C. (2007). Using comic strip conversations to increase social satisfaction and decrease loneliness in students with autism spectrum disorder. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 42*, 460-466.
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- Thiemann, K., & Goldstein, H. (2004). Effects of peer training and written text cuing on social communication of school age children with pervasive developmental disorder. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 47*, 126-144.

## RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- Cartooning: [http://www.iancommunity.org/cs/glossary\\_term.jsessionid=aEGUmLJNWWffv-1wrl?glossary.id=642](http://www.iancommunity.org/cs/glossary_term.jsessionid=aEGUmLJNWWffv-1wrl?glossary.id=642)  
This site links the user to a concise definition of cartooning and is part of a website with significant sources for parents.
- Comic Strip Conversations: <http://www.autismspectrumilstu.edu/resources/factsheets/comicstrip.shtml>  
This link contains a fact sheet about comic strip conversations.
- Glaeser, B. C., Pierson, M. R., & Fritschmann, N. (2003). Comic strip conversation: A positive behavioral support strategy. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 36*, 14-19.  
This article provides practical suggestions on how to use cartooning.

## GENERAL RESOURCES

- Autism Internet Modules (AIM) [www.autisminternetmodules.org](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org). The Autism Internet Modules were developed with one aim in mind: to make comprehensive, up-to-date, and usable information on autism accessible and applicable to educators, other professionals, and families who support individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Written by experts from across the U.S., all online modules are free, and are designed to promote understanding of, respect for, and equality of persons with ASD.
- The Autism Web Course: [http://cdd.unm.edu/swan/autism\\_course/about/index.htm](http://cdd.unm.edu/swan/autism_course/about/index.htm). This web course was developed out of materials from the Interactive Collaborative Autism Network (ICAN). The Autism Programs at the University of New Mexico has updated and added information to this web course.
  - Characteristics
  - Assessment
  - Academic Interventions
  - Behavioral Interventions
  - Communication Interventions
  - Environmental Interventions
  - Social Interventions

- Family Support Suggestions
- Indiana Resource Center for Autism (IRCA)  
<http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/fmain1.html>. The Indiana Resource Center for Autism staff's efforts are focused on providing communities, organizations, agencies, and families with the knowledge and skills to support children and adults in typical early intervention, school, community, work, and home settings.
  - IRCA Articles: <http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/index.php?pageId=273>
- Texas Statewide Leadership for Autism [www.txautism.net](http://www.txautism.net). The Texas Statewide Leadership for Autism in conjunction with the network of Texas Education Service center with a grant from the Texas Education Agency has developed a series of free online courses in autism. Please check the training page, [www.txautism.net/training.html](http://www.txautism.net/training.html), for update lists of courses, course numbers and registration information. Current courses include the following:
  - Asperger Syndrome 101
  - Augmentative and Alternative Communication and the Autism Spectrum
  - Autism for the General Education Teacher
  - Autism 101: Top Ten Pieces to the Puzzle
  - Classroom Organization: The Power of Structure for Individuals with ASD
  - Communication: The Power of Communication for Individuals with ASD
  - Futures Planning for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder
  - Navigating the Social Maze: Supports and Interventions for Individuals with ASD
  - Solving the Behavior Puzzle: Making Connections for Individuals with ASD